

A Walk in the Woods by Bill Bryson (1998)

He & friend, Katz, hiked 870 miles of the Appalachian Trail (AT) in 1996. They are comical. It is said the AT might be the largest volunteer-run undertaking on the planet. Most quit because it is not what they expected it to be. 1/3 of the continental US is covered in trees. 240 million acres are owned by the govt. The national forests have 8x more roads (mostly unpaved for loggers) than the total interstate highways.

He doesn't like clear-cutting, especially when they cut 209 acres of old-growth redwoods in OR. Most of their leasing deals lose money after they survey & build roads. It rains up to 120" in the Smokey's each year. The Great Smokey Mtn NP is the most popular NP in the nation. 1904 there was a great chestnut blight. 25% of the Appalachian trees were chestnuts & all died. The Shenandoah NP is over 100 miles long, but only a mile or two wide. It has the largest densities of black bear anywhere (1/sq mi) and its shelters are the best.

It was raining when they came to a shelter. The preppies inside weren't happy to share & were obnoxious all night. Finally, the two pitched their tent to get away from the noise. 5 minutes into their hike the next day, Katz has a confession: he took her shoe laces.

Between 1870 & WWI, 50,000 men died in American mines. One mine fire (anthracite) burned for 80 yrs. Some of these subterranean fires caused towns to be evacuated (Centralia, PA).

1850 New England was 70% farmland & 30% woods, today it is the reversed (most farmers moved to the Midwest). Norwich, CT is a charming town. 85% of NH is forest.

He warns about how quick the weather can change in the white mtns & how people can die from hypothermia if they reheat too fast. Appalachian Mtn Club is the oldest hiking club in the USA (since c.1880). By 1890 there were 200 hotels in the White Mtns (most are gone now). Shaws is the last guesthouse before the 100-mile wilderness.

Book: Into the Mountains (people died hiking the white mtns)

Painting: "Kindred Spirits" by Asher Brown Durand & "Delaware Water Gap" by George Innes